

SECURITY COVER FOR VENDING MACHINE BILL VALIDATOR

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the protection of currency validators in vending machines accessible by the public and, more particularly, to a security cover for bill validators used on such vending machines to prevent the bill validators from being broken into and the money removed.

Background of the Invention

Vending machines, such as for soft drinks, snacks, and the like, are often located outside and intended to be readily accessible to the public in stores and on the street. As the price of bottled beverages and snacks has increased, the use of bill validators on vending machines has become more widely used. The bill validators include a wide slot for entry of the bill, and for return of the bill if it is placed in the changer incorrectly or if the validator fails to identify and accept the bill as a valid bank-note. This wide mouth is susceptible to entry by a crowbar and being easily pried off so that access to the bills carried in the bill validator can be had. The problem of theft from bill validators and damaged bill validators depends, of course, on the location of the changers. However, many of the vending machines with bill validators are in locations clearly susceptible to theft. An experienced thief does not take long to break into an unprotected bill validator. The response to solving the problem has been largely to remove the vending machine from the location if it has been broken into more than twice, or to place a plate over the bill validator to render it completely inoperable to avoid further damage and theft. In the latter case, only coins can be used on the vending machine. Placing the machine in

condition to only operate with coins typically reduces the profit from the machine by 30-40%.

The prior art is replete with bill validators of various designs, none of which are provided with protection sufficient to withstand an assault from a thief with a 5 crowbar. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,964,336 shows a bill validator with a lid portion covering the internal workings of the validator which includes a bill slot for receiving and returning bills. No protection is provided to cover the bill slot and protect the bill validator. U.S. Patent No. 5,730,271 shows a security box for a bill validator that includes a lid with a bill feed mouth for receiving and returning bills. 10 Again, no separate protective cover is provided. U.S. Patent No. 5,495,929 shows an apparatus for validating bank-notes that includes an unprotected bill receptor. U.S. Patent No. 5,222,584 shows another type of currency validator with an unprotected bill entryway.

The prior art has not provided adequate security for protecting a bill validator 15 from a thief with a crowbar. Accordingly, protecting bill validators on vending machines accessible by the public at all hours remains a problem which needs considerably attention.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a security 20 cover for bill validators used on vending machines to prevent the bill validators from being broken into and the money removed.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a security cover for bill validators attached in such a manner as to prevent the removal of the security cover from the vending machine.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a security cover for bill validators adapted to allow bills to be inserted and returned through the security cover without becoming jammed between the bill validator and security cover.

Summary of the Invention

5 The above objectives are accomplished according to the present invention by providing a security cover for protecting a bill validator of a vending machine wherein the security cover comprises an elongated plate for attachment to a housing of the vending machine to cover the bill validator. A mask portion of the security cover is provided for covering a bill slot of the bill validator. The mask portion has an
10 entrance aligned with the bill slot for receiving and returning bills. A bill passageway is also aligned with the bill slot and the entrance of the mask portion. The bill passageway is defined by a first guide flange and a second guide flange spaced apart and carried between the bill slot and the entrance. The guide flanges terminating at a mouth portion of the bill validator around the bill slot and are
15 constructed and arranged relative to the bill slot so that bills may reliably pass from the entrance through the bill passageway into the bill slot, and from the bill slot outwardly through the bill passageway to the entrance during bill rejection;

Advantageously, the first guide flange is preferably contoured upward and the second guide flange is preferably contoured downward from said entrance to said
20 bill slot so that bills rejected from the bill validator that do not extend directly out from the bill slot are deflected by the flanges through the bill passageway to the entrance to prevent bills from lodging between the plate and the bill validator.

To help prevent removal of the security cover plate, tamper resistant fasteners are used for affixing the plate to an interior surface of the housing so that the fasteners are not exposed to the public. Additionally, the plate preferably has a height and width at least equal to the bill validator for protecting the bill validator from attempts to access the bill validator by breaking through the housing.

As a result, the bill validator of the vending machine is protected from vandalism and theft, while allowing continued operation of the bill validator.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The construction designed to carry out the invention will hereinafter be described, together with other features thereof. The invention will be more readily understood from a reading of the following specification and by reference to the accompanying drawings forming a part thereof, wherein an example of the invention is shown and wherein:

Figure 1 shows a perspective view of the rear side of the security cover according to the invention;

Figure 2 shows a front view of the security cover on a vending machine according to the invention;

Figure 3 shows a side view of the security cover on a vending machine according to the invention;

Figure 4 shows an exploded cross-section side view of the security cover and associated bill validator according to the invention;

Figure 5 shows a cross-section side view of the security cover in position over the bill validator receiving a bill according to the invention; and,

Figure 6 shows a cross-section side view of the security cover in position over the bill validator returning a bill according to the invention.

Detailed Description of a Preferred Embodiment

With reference to the drawings, the invention will now be described in more detail. Referring to Figure 1, a security cover, designated generally as A, is shown for attachment to a vending machine, designated generally as 12 (Figure 2) that dispenses soft drinks, snacks, and the like. Security cover A is intended to protect the vending machine's bill validator, designated generally as 14 (best shown in Figure 4), from theft and vandalism. Current bill validators on vending machines are susceptible to theft and vandalism achieved by prying or smashing the bill validators open with a crowbar, and then reaching into the bill validators to remove the bills.

The invention provides a separate durable tamper resistant security cover to protect the entire bill validator from vandalism and theft.

Referring to Figures 1 and 4, security cover A is shown in the preferred embodiment to be an elongated plate 16 of generally rectangular construction. Preferably, plate 16 is made of metal or other durable tamper resistant material capable of withstanding sever impacts and prying. Plate 16 includes a series of mounting holes 17 around the perimeter of plate 16 for receiving fasteners to attach the plate to vending machine 12 in a manner overlying and covering bill validator 14. Plate 16 is defined as having a front side 20 and a rear side 24.

Generally, vending machine 12 includes a front door 18 pivotally carried by a cabinet 23 which holds the drinks or other items. Bill validator 14 is typically carried by cabinet 23 with a portion extending through front door 18 to provide access to the

public for inserting bills. In order to replenish items in the vending machine and legitimately remove bills from the bill validator, a vendor must unlock and open front door 18. Most advantageously, security cover A is flush mounted to an inside surface 22 of front door 18 adjacent bill validator 14 so that when the front door is 5 closed, the bill validator is covered to prevent direct access by the public to the bill validator or fasteners attaching the security cover to the front door. Also, in alternative arrangements, tamper resistant fasteners can be used to mount the security cover to both the inside and outside of door 18 to prevent removal.

Referring to Figures 2-4, in the preferred embodiment, bill validator 14 is 10 carried by cabinet 23 so that when front door 18 is closed against cabinet 23, a mouth portion, designated generally as 30, of bill validator 14 extends through a door opening, designated generally as 19, of front door 18 to provide access to the bill validator by the public. Front side 20 of security cover A is positioned facing interior surface 22 of front door 18. Accordingly, rear side 24 is positioned facing bill 15 validator 14 when mounted to front door 18. Advantageously, tamper resistant fasteners 40 may be used for affixing plate 16 to interior surface 22 of front door 18, so that access cannot be had to the fasteners from the exterior of the vending machine, and access to the bill validator or otherwise tampering with security cover A is prevented. In an alternative arrangement, security cover A may be affixed to 20 exterior 28 of front door 18 to cover mouth portion 30 using any number of appropriate tamper resistant fasteners commonly known to one skilled in the art.

Referring to Figure 1, a mask portion, designated generally as 26, is included in plate 16 for cover mouth portion 30 of bill validator 14. In the preferred

embodiment illustrated in figures 5 and 6, security cover A is mounted to interior surface 22 of front door 18 with mask portion 26 extending through door opening 19 (figure 4) in front door 18. Mask portion 26 is constructed and arranged to cover mouth portion 30 of bill validator 14 so that the otherwise exposed mouth portion of
5 the bill validator is protected by the mask portion of the security cover. Thus, a thief is prevented from using a crowbar, and the like, to strike and pry open the bill validator to steal the money inside.

Referring to Figure 1, a bill entrance 32 is included in mask portion 26 for allowing bills to pass through the security cover to the bill validator, and from the bill
10 validator outwardly through the entrance when a bill is rejected. Referring to Figure 5, entrance 32 is aligned with a bill slot 38 disposed in mouth portion 30 of bill validator 14 so that when a bill 42 is inserted through entrance 32, the bill is received in bill slot 38 for validation by the bill validator processes.

Referring to figures 1 and 4, to ensure the proper passage of bills between
15 the security cover and the bill validator, a bill passageway, designated generally as 33, is defined by a first guide flange 34 and a second guide flange 36 spaced apart entrance 32 and carried on rear side 24 of plate 16 in mask portion 26. Guide flanges 34 and 36 border the top and bottom sides of entrance 32, as best shown in Figure 1. Referring to Figures 5 and 6, guide flanges 34 and 36 are constructed and
20 arranged relative to bill slot 38 for terminating in mouth portion 30 of bill validator 14 so that bills may reliably pass through entrance 32 into bill slot 38, and from bill slot 38 outwardly through bill passageway 33 to entrance 32 during bill rejection.

Referring to Figure 6, to ensure the bills pass properly through security cover A when rejected back through bill passageway 33 in the event the bill is not properly validated, first guide flange 34 is contoured upward and second guide flange 36 is contoured downward to provide a wide opening between the guide flanges for receiving and channeling bill 42 through bill passageway 33 to entrance 32. As shown in Figure 6, bills rejected from bill validator 14 that are bent and otherwise do not extend directly out from bill slot 38 are deflected by flanges 34 and 36 through bill passageway 33 to entrance 32 to prevent bills from lodging between plate 16 and bill validator 14. Alternatively, depending on the make and model of the bill validator and vending machine, guide flanges 34 and 36 may be arranged to fit around mouth portion 30 to channel bills into entrance 32, or otherwise extend in such a manner as to guide a bill from entrance 32 to bill slot 38. Additionally, mask portion 26 may not be required to protrude as illustrated depending on the make and model of the bill validator and vending machine, but rather, plated 16 may align flat against front door 18 over door opening 19 and simply include bill entrance 32 aligned in front of mouth portion 30 of bill validator 14 with guide flanged 34 and 36 constructed and arranged as described above.

Referring to Figure 2, security cover A has a width slightly larger than bill validator 14 for protecting the bill validator from attempts to access the bill validator by breaking through front door 18. Additionally, referring to Figure 3, security cover A has a height at slightly taller than bill validator 14 for protecting the bill validator from attempts to access the bill validator by breaking through the housing.

While a preferred embodiment of the invention has been described using specific terms, such description is for illustrative purposes only, and it is to be understood that changes and variations may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the following claims.